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ABSTRACT

This paper raises and answers the question of whether professors of educational administration and school administrators are scholar practitioners or simply practitioner scholars. It concludes that the professors are scholar practitioners because they contemplate the practice of administration via theory and research. School administrators are practitioner scholars because they actually practice administration using scholarly theoretical foundation literature to guide practice. Indeed, the scholar practitioner professor shares a generic and professional kinship with the practitioner scholar school administrator on the basis that they both blend art, science, and craft to achieve educational goals. (JAM)

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ARE WE SCHOLAR PRACTITIONERS, THEORETICIANS, OR PRACTITIONERS?

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ARE WE SCHOLAR PRACTITIONERS, THEORETICIANS, OR PRACTITIONERS?*

The Argument

A model or organizing framework helps us lead our thoughts down productive pathways. A model, by its nature, provides us elements--or variables--that we can arrange, re-arrange, test and discuss. This reductionism seems like the work of a pedant, if not a theoretician.

A model may guide behavior in fulfilling some mission. In this sense, a model gives direction as the practitioner sets about the business of doing what is required. The model may provide guidance, but the practitioner enlarges and adds specifics to the model.

A model, first brought to my attention by Paula Silver while working on issues relating to the APEX Center, helps me to conceptualize, theorize, and then answer the question, "Are we scholar-practitioners, theoreticians, or practitioners?" (The "we" in the question seems to represent those in the professoriate). I have, for now, developed an answer. This paper provides a quick tour along the twisting road that I trekked to collect ideas for this answer. As with much that we incorporate into our daily regimens, I have lost the record of all those whom I should credit for helping

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*C.M. Achilles, Chair, Education Administration, Higher Education and Research, U. of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27412-5001. Paper for NCPEA. W. Michigan U. 8/19/88. The proposed categories are not discrete. Each is a practitioner in his/her own field of work. A theoretician practices theorizing; a researcher practices researching; a practitioner practices practicing. I am wary of those, usually "practitioners," who claim that professors have lost touch with "the real world." Whose real world? The real world of being a professor? I think not. Probably the "real world" of P.S. 1984. Yet what about enlarging the circle to include, rather than exclude, each from the other's "real world." There are other options. What of the "real world" of education (to which both professor practitioner and P.S. practitioner can and do belong)? Then, of course, there is the real world of life--of being human. Here will be common grounds for discussions to help us all in our mission. "He drew a circle and shut me out./Heretic, Rebel, a thing to Flout./But Love and I had the wit to win./We drew a circle and took him in."

Although this paper does take a position, it raises a question about the clear role definition implied in the title. The professor of education administration, as scholar-practitioner, blends on one side into the theoretician and on the other side into the practitioner-scholar. The administrator of schools, as practitioner-scholar blends on one side into the craftsman and on the other into the scholar-practitioner.

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with this question. An obvious credit goes to Silver (1987) who organized the ideas expressed in Figure 1 which suggests that those in the professions--for this presentation I consider education a profession, recognizing the potential for disagreement--focus on three questions, WHAT? HOW? and WHY? The professional deals with human concerns and problems which require the judicious blending of knowing what to do, how to do it, and why a particular action should be taken. Those in the disciplines are driven by two questions: WHAT? and WHY? Craftsmen and practitioners follow the guiding questions: WHAT? and HOW? Professionals are the meeting grounds for theory and practice.

The professors (we) of education administration are neighbors to the theoreticians in the disciplines while our professional colleagues, the practitioners (perhaps the administrator of P.S. 1984), reside next to crafts-people. Most education administration professors have had some practice as practitioners and through training and experience may have even theorized some. The professor now practices theorizing and scholarship and not administering of P.S. 1984. But in researching, studying and contemplating the practice of administering P.S. 1984, the professor is a scholar-practitioner. This professor is a bridge, a link, a filter, a roadblock, etc. on the two-way street between theoreticians (the disciplines) and practitioners (the crafts) as shown in Figure 1.

A professional uses and builds upon a knowledge base which is advanced both through research and theory (the realm of theoretician and academician) and through the lore of what works in the craft-like aspect of performance (the realm of technician and craftsman). (Figure 2) While knowledge which advances by research and theory can be learned in scholarly ways, knowledge which accumulates through craft and application is personal and needs reflection; it is learned by the experience of trial and error. The notion of reflection in the profession has recently been added to the lexicon of legitimate ways to come to understand school administration.

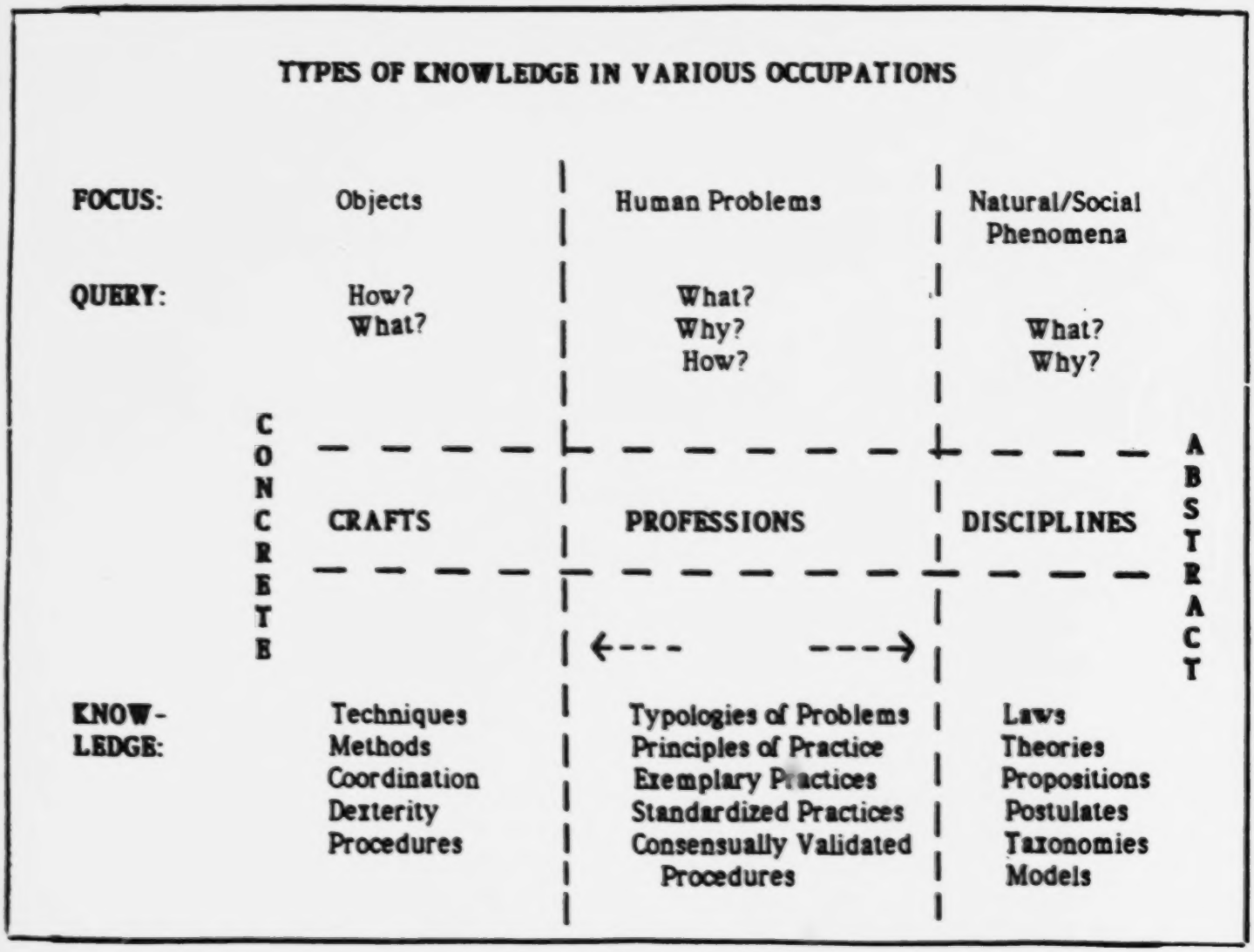


FIGURE 1. TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE IN VARIOUS OCCUPATIONS: CRAFTS, PROFESSIONS AND DISCIPLINES. (A MODEL FOR CONTEMPLATING THE DEFINITION OF EACH FIELD) FIGURES 1 AND 2 ARE FROM A DRAFT PAPER SHARED BY P. SILVER WITH THE AUTHOR (1985).

	KEY QUESTIONS			
	HOW	WHAT	WHY	TRAINING
Craftsman	Practice	Trail/Error	N/A	Apprenticeship
Technician	Training	Theory Base	N/A	Schooling Apprenticeship
Academician	N/A or Vicarious/ Observation	Research	Study Analysis	Schooling Study
Professional	Practice	Training	Study Reflection	All of Above

FIGURE 2. KEY QUESTIONS AND THE TRAINING BASIS FOR DEVELOPING EXPERTNESS IN FOUR OCCUPATION CATEGORIES.

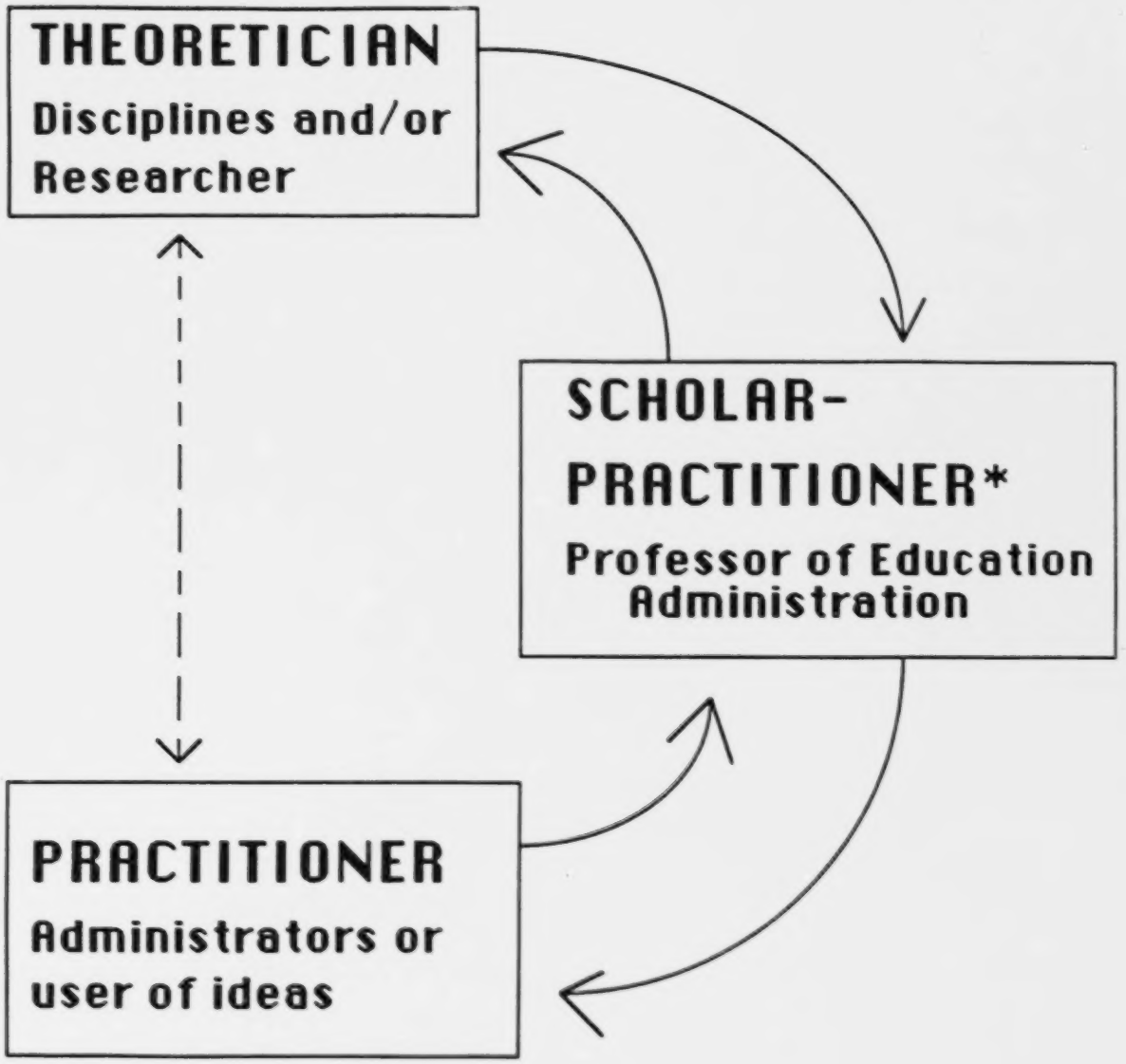
The Position

Professors of Education Administration should be scholar-practitioners. This does not mean being a fence-sitter. We are not theoreticians in the sense that we generate new knowledge in the disciplines. Neither are we practitioners in the sense that we use knowledge to administer P.S. 1984. As scholar-practitioners we study, interpret and bridge the fatuous theory-practice chasm. The road over the bridge goes both ways. (Figure 3). In travelling one way, we seek to understand the research, theories, propositions, models, etc. of theoreticians and conceptualize ways that these can be used to improve practice. We convey our reasoned ideas for practitioners to test. In travelling the other way, we seek to identify problems, issues and concerns of the practice of administration and pass along our knowledge-able generalizations for theoreticians to contemplate and analyze. We translate problems of practice for theoreticians to study and results of research for practi-tioners to employ.

Some scholar-practitioners are closer to the disciplines and theoreticians than others; others are closer to the practitioners in the profession. Some practitioners are closer to the scholar-practitioners in the profession than others, while other practitioners border the craftsmen. This conceptualization allows the professor of education administration to be a theoretician and a practitioner to varying degrees; it also allows an administrator of education to be a practitioner and theoretician to varying degrees. Perhaps the willingness and ability to question and reflect define each person's position on the continuum (Figure 4).

Preparation as Scholar-Practitioner or Practitioner-Scholar (Professional)

A professional in education administration is a combination of scholar and practitioner. That individual's preparation must attend to the three questions that define the professional: WHY? WHAT? and HOW? Thus, a scholar-practitioner's pre-paration program will include art, science and craft (Achilles, 1985). Without all



* Or, Perhaps, a Practitioner - Scholar who is a reflective administrator of Education

Figure 3. The Scholar-Practitioner as the Bridge across the Theory/Practice enigma.

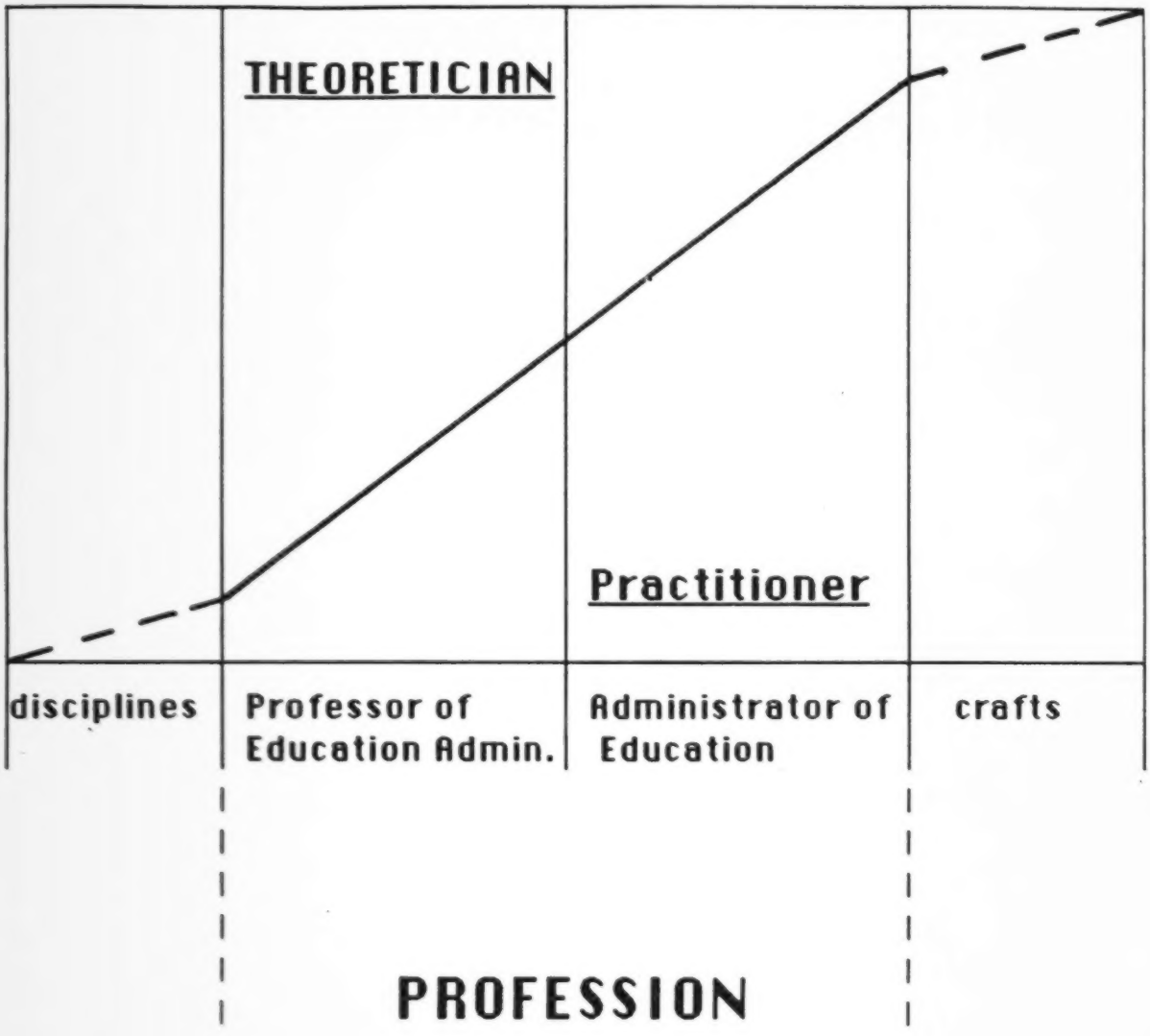


Figure 4. The "Balance" between theory and practice for various professional roles in education: The administrator of education, or practitioner scholar and the education administration professor, or scholar-practitioner.

three key elements, a preparation program does not fully serve the scholar-practitioner (professor) and the practitioner-scholar (administrator). These three elements constitute what many recognize as a sound basis for professional preparation programs (NCEEA, 1987): the learning of general and specific knowledge bases, the development of skills derived from the knowledge bases, and focused and guided practice to sharpen the knowledge and skills into the craft of school administration. (Figure 5)

Conclusion

The professor of Education Administration is (or should be) a scholar-practitioner. This professor must accept the role of scholar-practitioner. The practitioner of administering schools must accept the role of practitioner-scholar if both are to be professionals in the complex field of education.

Among all professions, this compound role is probably most true in education administration, for in the very administering of schools (practice) our metier is knowledge (the domain of the scholar). Since the many activities of administering schools are varied and rapid, the administrator must almost intuitively apply knowledge and skills. Thus, the professional in education administration is neither just a scholar nor just a practitioner. The successful professor of education administration is a scholar-practitioner who studies and professes the necessity of balancing art, science and craft to achieve education's diverse goals. Indeed, the scholar-practitioner shares a generic and professional kinship with the practitioner-scholar who administers the schools through a judicious blend of art, science and craft to achieve education's diverse goals.

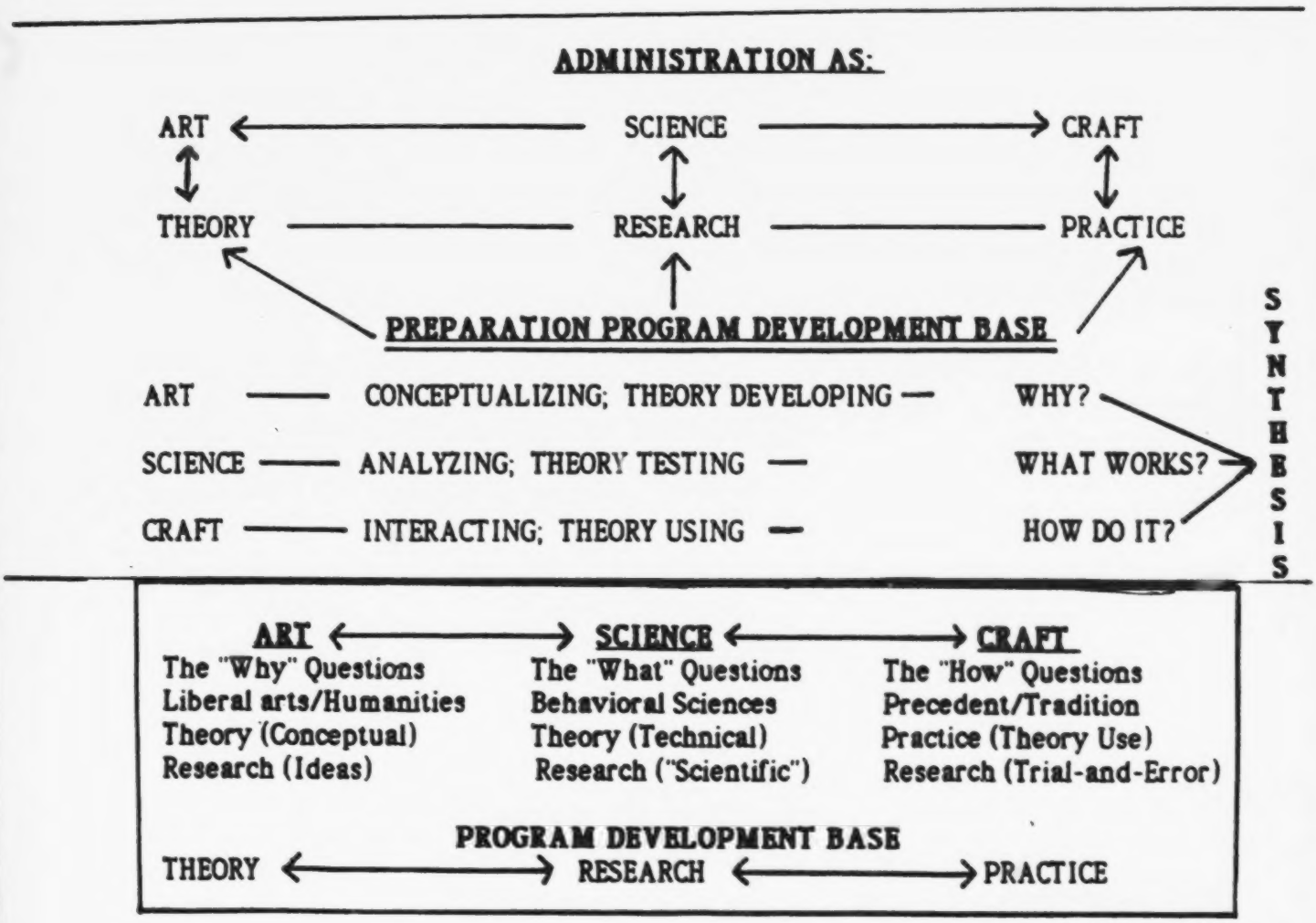


Figure 5. A conceptual base for developing preparation programs for professionals in Education Administration.

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